

MANITOBA

HISTORICAL AND

SCIENTIFIC SOCIETY

WINNIPEG.

8

TRANSACTION NO. 8 SEASON 1883-4.

IN MEMORIAM.

LATE A. K. ISBISTER, M.A., LL.B.

HONORARY MEMBER.

BY

REV. PROFESSOR BRYCE, M. A., LL.B.,

CORRESPONDING SECRETARY.

A paper read before the Society on the evening
of 26th July, 1883.

WINNIPEG:
MANITOBA DAILY FREE PRESS.
1883.



OBSERVATIONS AT STONY MOUNTAIN.

A meeting of the Executive Council of the Historical and Scientific Society was held Thursday evening, July 26, Mr. T. C. Armstrong in the chair.

It was agreed to take steps to have an exploration of certain districts in the West, and certain members of the Society were appointed in connection with history, natural history, geology, topography and botany of the districts. The details were left over for further consideration.

The Corresponding Secretary was appointed to make arrangements for an early visit to the Indian mound on the east side of the Red River near Selkirk.

Mr. C. N. Bell reported that he had inquired into the feasibility of visiting the Indian mounds on the Rainy river. He had written to Rat Portage and ascertained that a party could be taken by one of the steamers and that men could be got to Rat Portage to open the mound; also that the cost of the expedition would be about \$65. Action was deferred on the report in the meantime.

The Secretary reported that he had received from the Provincial Government the annual grant of \$250.

MEETING OF THE SOCIETY.

After the meeting of the executive council, a general meeting of the Society was held. Mr. H. M. Howell was chosen to occupy the chair.

The following new members were elected:—Dr. Macadam, Messrs. Wm. Clarke and Isaac Campbell, Dr. Rankine Dawson, and Messrs. John McDonald, J. Ernest Cyr and T. A. Bernier.

Mr. Panton gave a brief synopsis of his observations at Stony Mountain on Tuesday last, when he was accompanied by Mr. Goodridge. They had found a magnificent display of glacial action, the material being five feet in depth and the surface of the rock perfectly smooth and polished. Again they had found no fossils in the large quarry or in the uppermost layer of rock; but Mr. Bedson had taken them to the edge of the escarpment behind the penitentiary, where at a depth of forty feet through the solid rock a reddish colored limestone was found which was full of fossils. Mr. Panton secured three varieties of univalves. They also observed an exceedingly honeycombed appearance of many fragments of rocks fallen from the escarpment. This was due to the action of carbonic acid gas brought down by rain. The rock was much harder than that at Selkirk. The fossils were also entirely of a different nature from those at Selkirk, coral greatly predominating in the latter and shells in the former.

Rev. Prof. Bryce, corresponding secretary, read a very interesting paper on the life of the late A. K. Isbister, M.A., LL.B., an honorary member of the society, of London, Eng.

IN MEMORIAM.

Notes and Reminiscences of the Late A. K. Isbister, M.A., LL.B., Honorary Member of the Historical and Scientific Society of Manitoba. A Paper Read before the Society by Rev. Prof. Bryce, M.A., LL.B., of Manitoba College.

The following interesting paper was read Thursday eve. before the Historical and Scientific Society by the Rev. Prof. Bryce, Corresponding Secretary of the Society:

The winter before last one Sunday morning by appointment we met Mr. Isbister in London to go to service in the Temple Church. Mr. Isbister was a barrister and had a right to all the privileges connected with the legal profession including admission to this church. Turning in at Temple Bar, where now stands a hideous obelisk a hindrance to traffic on Fleet street and where formerly stood that entrance to the old city over which in the last cen-

tury the Jacobites' heads were posted—entering by the passage we came to the ground and enclosure of the middle temple of which Mr. Isbister was a member. There lay stretching through courts and gateways eastward the buildings of the inner temple. Tradition says there was once an outer temple though nothing trustworthy remains about it. These temples are now the abodes of the legal fraternity, whose predecessors were the Knight Templars a society of military clerics. The master of the temple is the well known Dr. Vaughan, the clergyman who officiates in the Temple Church, who has as a privilege freedom from the super-

vision of the Bishop of London. We entered the church which is one of the few remaining round churches of England. Around you on entrance lie the black stone effigies of Knight Templars—those who had been at the Crusades with legs crossed. On advancing further, a custom pointing to the monkish antecedents of the members of the Temple is met with—our party was divided, one part to a portion set off for ladies and the sterner sex admitted to the privileged seats. After a pleasant service and an excellent homily from the master, we then passed into the middle Temple hall, where the benchers dine, and where fledglings of the law must "eat their way to the bar." by dining so many times in term. Mr. Isbister, with great gusto, entered into the traditions of the place, and was a most pleasant cicerone. We then passed by the church and stood before a grave with plain graystone sarcophagus, and on it the simple words, "Here lies Oliver Goldsmith." We dropt a tear at the tomb of the guileless but gifted son of adversity and passed on. Coming out to Fleet street we crossed it and through a few passages came to Bolt Court. For many years Mr. Isbister, in connection with the educational work he had in hand, occupied offices—the very rooms, indeed, where the great Dr. Johnson had lived. Indeed it was in Bolt Court that the burly English man-of-letters died. Homeward bound, we left the part of London whose every foot was instinct with memories of dramatists, poets and literateurs, and we were glad to have had so kindly a guide. This was our first acquaintance, though but preliminary to other opportunities of knowing and appreciating the man more fully.

EARLIER LIFE.

Alexander Kennedy Isbister was born in 1822 at Cumberland House, on the Saskatchewan. On both sides he was of Orkney descent, as his name indicates. He had also a trace of Indian blood in his veins. He was thus thoroughly identified with the earlier population of the country, and always retained that strong love for the land of his birth so characteristic of the natives of the Northwest. It is somewhat remarkable the part taken by the people from the Orkney Islands in the earlier history of the country. They did a large part of the severe pioneer work which made the Hudson's Bay Company strong. In the year 1775 the Northwest traveler, Alexander Henry, visited Cumberland House, which had been built the year before by Hearne, and found it garrisoned by men from "the Orkney Islands." The large part of the men belonging to the Hudson's Bay people in the country from that time up to the time of Lord Selkirk's colony in 1812 must have belonged to these islands, for when Governor Semple was killed, in 1816, the French song commemorating the victory speaks of three of the settlers having been taken prisoners, and refers to them as "Des Orcanais." There

can be no doubt that the people from the Orkneys, who are of Norse ancestry, and are quite distinct from the Celtic Highlanders, by their patience and perseverance, quiet disposition and industrious habits and power of endurance was peculiarly suited for the hardships of a wilderness life and for dealing with the Indian tribes in that "canny" and shrewd way which begets confidence in the average mind. Those acquainted with the country will readily recognize such names among the older people as Isbister, Inkster, Fobister, Mowat, Omand, Flett, Linklater, Norquay, Tait, Monkman and the like from the Orkneys. Young Isbister was the son of an officer in the Hudson's Bay Company, whose family, on the father being killed in the Company's service at Norway House, settled in the parish of St. Andrews about the year 1833, alongside the rapids of the Red River. On the maternal side Alexander Isbister was a Kennedy. His mother is an elder sister of Capt. Kennedy, of St. Andrews, well known as one of Lady Franklin's captains, who delivered two most entertaining lectures on his "Arctic Explorations" before this society. Old Mrs. Isbister lived with her son till his death. She is now an old lady of 83. In the winter of 1881 she was still hale and hearty, and had a passionate longing to see the Red River of her early life. It is with sorrow her friends will learn that she is not now in such good health. The Kennedys were formerly proprietors of some of the islands between the Orkney's and the mainland, notably the Island of Stromo. At the time of the Pretender, when so many estates changed hands in Scotland, one brother favored King George and the other Prince Charlie. The fortunes of war were in favor of the other line, and the Kennedys, of whom we are speaking, as the subject of our sketch, is relating the ins and outs of the matter, with great glee confessed, were left "out in the cold." Mr. Isbister, by the Kennedy side, is related as a third cousin or so to the Hon. A. G. B. Bannatyne, and was a nephew by marriage of Chief Factor Christie.

BOYISH DAYS.

Settled on the Red River at the age of eleven, the subject of our sketch showed an early inclination for study, and soon was sent to the nucleus of what has now become St. John's College in this city then known as the McCallum school. Spending a few years here the young student, at about the age of sixteen, entered the service of the Hudson's Bay Company as an articled clerk. His lot was cast in the far-off Mackenzie district, and here he gained his acquaintance with the fur trade and the company's affairs, so useful to him in his after career. With a strong desire to obtain a professional education the young clerk, having served his three years' time in the company's offices left the service and returned to

Red River. Having spent a year in "the settlement," as Assiniboia was called up to only a few years ago, he left his native land for England in 1842, and though ardently attached to it never had the privilege of seeing it again.

AT THE UNIVERSITY.

The well developed fur trader now entered upon scenes of a different kind from the remote Mackenzie River. He was a successful student, and took both his M.A. and LL.B. degrees. In appearance he was stalwart, standing about 6 feet 3 inches, and was a fine looking man. He was a man of excellent address, of very great conversational powers, and enthusiastically devoted to any cause he espoused. After a successful student career he entered upon the study of law, and in due time became an English barrister. His mind was upon his native country, and at that time the questions arising in England were peculiarly interesting to the young and the ardent. It was a few years after the passing of the Reform Bill, and it was in the air to examine into the affairs of

OLD MONOPOLIES.

For the young man of high hopes and a broad sense of justice not to be a Liberal and a Reformer is unnatural. It is as men get older and find that the world is not so easily set to rights as they had supposed that they become Conservative. One can quite imagine the ardency with which one, who retained even to the last a buoyancy and hopefulness as to the triumph of true and just principles, entered on the work of bringing his fellow-countrymen to enjoy all the rights of British subjects. Mr. Isbister related to the writer his experience in dealing with some of the affairs of a society called the "New England Society," which was supposed to have outgrown its usefulness, indicating a thorough-going and practical turn of mind.

RED RIVER OPENED UP.

With great perseverance in England and on the Red River the case was worked up by which Representative Institutions were to replace the Hudson's Bay Company's rule, it must be said, was patriarchal, on the whole kindly, but could not have stood the strain of a larger population, "or a people less docile than the English half-breeds of Red River. Mr. Isbister promptly undertook the task of liberalizing the Government of Red River, and throwing open the fertile land of the Northwest to the world—a land too good to be kept as the preserve for bears and foxes. After petition from the people of Red River was sent to the British Government by the hands of Mr. Isbister, and he became known as the champion of popular rights for the people of the settlement. He had acquired a quantity of Hudson's Bay Company stock and so was enabled to speak from a more influential

stand point. The excitement culminated in the appointment of a Committee by the Imperial Parliament, the results of which are embodied in the Blue Book of 1857. In a general sketch such as this, it is unnecessary to enter into a statement of the details of the struggle. The Hudson's Bay Company wisely discerned the signs of the times, made excellent terms with the Government, and has now in a wholehearted and earnest way thrown in its lot with the country, and become one of the strongest forces in its development. Mr. Isbister informed the writer that he had long ago made up his quarrels with the Hudson's Bay Company. He looked back with no regrets on the part he had taken, but he recognized in the Hudson's Bay Company an honorable and useful corporation. As a retired official of the Company he had the feeling of attachment that is so strong a feature of all its employes.

AS AN EDUCATIONIST.

Mr. Isbister had, however, a strong leaning to the cause of education. It was not strange that one of his ardent and sympathetic mind should be fond of teaching. It is surely one of the most honorable and useful of professions. For many years in Bolt Court he labored in connection with an educational institution. In 1851 he became a Fellow of an organization since grown to large dimensions, "The College of Preceptors." Its object was to serve as a high class examining board to give certificates of acquaintance with certain departments of knowledge. In 1881 this board issued 11,000 certificates. Mr. Isbister was also Dean of this College of Preceptors. He was the author of several text books on educational subjects, and up to the end of life had the responsibility of editing an educational magazine of some importance.

HIS BOUNTY.

The generous nature of Mr. Isbister did not confine itself to sympathy for the people struggling for their rights, nor to the efforts of the young to gain an education. He gave about the time of the transfer of this Province £100 stg. in American bonds, of which the interest has been used in the shape of prizes to the Public Schools of this Province, and in 1881 he gave a handsome subscription to Manitoba College. It is known that for years he has been considering the propriety of establishing in his native land some useful educational institution. At one time this was thought of as a 'Normal School' and the University Act bears traces of an intention to provide for this on the part of the framers of the Act. Since that, the University of Manitoba has shown itself to have the "potency" for future good. Mr. Isbister was greatly delighted with the unsectarian character of the University, so thoroughly uniting all ideas in the country. He had a great

desire to see the Province. He has now left a monument more enduring than brass in the splendid gift of upwards of \$60,000 to the Manitoba University, and his large library which the writer had an opportunity of examining.

KIND MEMORIES.

As a society striving to commemorate the deeds of generosity and worth of those belonging to our territory it becomes us while mingling our tears with the friends of our departed brother to yet rejoice in the honor done to us by achievements of our late Honorary Member.

His efforts for the cause of civil liberty: His lifelong devotion to education and every benevolent and humanizing agency: and his overflowing generosity to this Province and the University of Manitoba make his name one that surely we shall not willingly let die.

A cordial vote of thanks to the lecturer was passed on motion of Mr. J. Hoyes Pantan, seconded by Mr. R. E. W. Goodridge, the mover speaking in highly complimentary terms of the paper as reflecting great credit on the writer. The motion included a resolution that the paper be printed.

Prof. Bryce in acknowledging the expression made a further interesting reference to his visit to Mr. Isbister. Although it was 41 years since he had left this country, he continued to take a very deep interest in all that concerned it. He was in receipt of the newspapers published here and was continually meeting with people from the Northwest. His aged mother, with whom and his sister he liv-

ed being unmarried; and himself both longed to see this country again. Though resident so long in the north of London their whole hearts were out here. His life was a beautiful life, and he was a genial kind man thoroughly devoted to duty.

On motion of Mr. Pantan seconded by Mr. Bell, it was resolved that a minute in connection with the death of the late Mr. Isbister an honorary member of the society, be drawn up and forwarded by the corresponding secretary of the society to the family of the deceased.

The following is the minute prepared:- The Historical and Scientific Society of Manitoba desires to express its high appreciation of its lately departed Honorary Member Alexander Kennedy Isbister, M. A., LL.B., Barrister, of London, England. His distinguished services in connection with the opening up of the Northwest ought ever to be gratefully remembered by Canadians, and his self-denying labors for the people of his native land are worthy of most warm remembrance by them. His high scholarship and distinguished service to education in England were united with a singularly simple and attractive manner, and his high character, benevolent disposition, and generous remembrance of the land of his birth deserve especial recognition. This Society would express its loss of the name of so distinguished a representative of the native people of the country from its list of Honorary Members, and directs that a copy of this resolution be sent to the aged mother and bereaved sister conveying the warmest sympathy of the Society.

